

COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY
DEPUTY RANKING MEMBER

COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Tonight's health care reform vote in the U.S. House of Representatives was an historic one. I write to express my gratitude for your commitment to reform and to explain why I could not, in good conscience, support the Senate health care reform bill.

I have had the great honor of discussing with you one-on-one several times my personal position on health care reform. To me, ensuring access to affordable health care is a moral imperative. My father, brother, and sister all suffer from serious health conditions, and I constantly worry about the cost and quality of their health insurance. Because my family's struggles are hardly unique, I remain deeply concerned about the quality and accessibility of health care in the United States. My commitment to health care reform was clearly demonstrated when I crossed party lines in November to vote for the House health care reform bill.

But, there is one issue that has remained at the center of all health care reform discussions on which I simply cannot compromise. That is the weakening of existing laws on federal funding of abortion. The Stupak-Pitts amendment to the House health care reform bill applied the Hyde Amendment, upholding long-standing federal law banning federal funding of abortion except in the instance of rape, incest, or danger to the life of the mother. Similarly strong language was not adopted by the Senate, paving the way for one of the greatest expansions of federal funding of abortion this nation has ever seen.

To me, a moral ethicist and a former Jesuit seminarian, and to literally tens of thousands of the Louisianans I represent, the Senate abortion language is dangerously insufficient. Under the Senate bill, federal vouchers can be used to purchase insurance plans that cover abortion on demand. Federal courts will force community health clinics receiving billions of dollars in new federal funding not covered by the Hyde restrictions to perform taxpayer-financed abortions. Moreover, the conscience protection clauses in the Senate bill fail to prevent governmental bodies under the Act from discriminating against physicians and nurses who object to abortion.


Despite your Administration's best intentions, the Executive Order you plan to issue stating that abortions would not be funded under the Senate Bill could be overturned in the federal courts given their consistent rulings that the federal government must pay for abortions unless Congress explicitly adds the Hyde Amendment prohibiting them. Federal statutes, unlike Executive Orders, require consensus in the House and Senate to change. This Executive Order can be changed without Congressional consent or revoked by future Presidents.

The Senate bill's weakening of existing law and expansion of abortion services, to me, is insurmountable. I cannot support a bill that undermines the Hyde Amendment, which Congress adopted in 1976 to stop the more than 300,000 abortions each year being funded by the federal government. I came to Congress to represent my constituents and their needs. And, I have always said that I am an independent thinker who puts aside partisan wrangling to do the business of the people. At the end of the day, though, there are some principles on which I cannot compromise and on which my constituents would not want me to. Expanding federal funding of abortion is one.

Mr. President, on September 9, 2009, in your address to a joint session of Congress, you said: "No federal dollars will be used to fund abortions, and federal conscience laws will remain in place." My respect for you, already deep, grew upon hearing you say that. On the basis of this statement and because of our personal relationship, I early on pledged myself as your partner in health care reform, and I gave you my word that I would come to you as an honest and thoughtful broker, checking politics and partisanship at the door for the good of my constituents and the nation.

Nothing in my vote tonight changes that commitment.

Sincerely,



Anh "Joseph" Cao
Member of Congress